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HACKING DEMOCRACY

How Trump's pursuit of Putin has left the U.S. vulnerable to the Russia threat

BY GREG MILLER, GREG JAFFE AND PHILIP RUCKER

In the final days before Donald Trump was sworn in as president, members of his inner circle pleaded with him to acknowledge publicly what U.S. intelligence agencies had already concluded — that Russia's interference in the 2016 election was real.

Holding impromptu interventions in Trump's 26th-floor corner office at Trump Tower, advisers — including Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, and designated chief of staff, Reince Priebus — prodded the president-elect to accept the findings that the nation's spy chiefs had personally presented to him on Jan. 6.

They sought to convince Trump that he could affirm the validity of the intelligence without diminishing his electoral win, according to three officials involved in the sessions. More important, they said that doing so was the only way to put the matter behind him politically and free him to pursue his goal of closer ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"This was part of the normalization proc-

Refusing to accept U.S. intelligence findings, the president has resisted or attempted to roll back efforts to hold Moscow accountable for meddling in the 2016 election

Video report How Trump has fought the intelligence on Russia. Watch at wapo.st/trump-putin.

ess," one participant said. "There was a big effort to get him to be a standard president."

But as aides persisted, Trump became agitated. He railed that the intelligence couldn't be trusted and scoffed at the suggestion that his candidacy had been propelled by forces other than his own strategy, message and charisma.

Told that members of his incoming Cabinet had already publicly backed the intelligence report on Russia, Trump shot back, "So what?" Admitting that the Kremlin had hacked Democratic Party emails, he said, was a "trap."

As Trump addressed journalists on Jan. 11 in the lobby of Trump Tower, he came as close as he ever would to grudging acceptance. "As far as hacking, I think it was Russia," he said, adding that "we also get hacked by other countries and other people."

As hedged as those words were, Trump regretted them almost immediately. "It's not me," he said to aides afterward. "It wasn't right."

Nearly a year into his presidency, Trump continues to reject the evidence that Russia TRUMP CONTINUED ON A12

Split FCC votes to end rules on net neutrality

MANDATORY EQUALITY OF ACCESS TO END

Foes vow to prevent an Internet favoring big players

BY BRIAN FUNG

Federal regulators voted Thursday to allow Internet providers to speed up service for websites they favor — and block or slow down others — in a decision repealing landmark Obama-era regulations overseeing broadband companies such as AT&T and Verizon.

The move by the Federal Communications Commission to deregulate the telecom and cable industries was a prominent example of the policy shifts taking place in Washington under President Trump and a major setback for consumer groups, technology companies and Democrats who had lobbied heavily against the decision.

The 3-to-2 vote along party lines enabled the FCC's Republican chairman, Ajit Pai, to follow

through on his promise to repeal the government's 2015 net neutrality rules, which required Internet providers to treat all websites, large and small, equally. The agency also rejected some of its own authority over the broadband industry in a bid to stymie future FCC officials who might seek to reverse the decision.

The result was a redrawing of the FCC's oversight powers at a time of rapid transformation in the media and technology sectors.

The vote has also cast a spotlight on Pai, once a little-known regulator, who has become one of the faces of deregulation in the Trump era. On the eve of the vote, NEUTRALITY CONTINUED ON A21

Defending his decision FCC chairman uses a wacky video to say the Internet will be fine. A21

Disney gobbling up Fox to fight tech competition

Murdoch will retain news assets as part of \$52.4 billion deal

BY STEVEN ZEITCHIK

NEW YORK — The Walt Disney Co. announced Thursday that it will acquire the majority of assets from rival 21st Century Fox, a megamerger that aims to reset the balance of power in an industry under siege from Silicon Valley.

The merger pairs Disney, the No. 1 studio at the box office and the company behind such massive hits as the "Avengers" and "Star Wars" reboots, with the

No. 3 studio, Fox, which has produced the "X-Men" and "Avatar" movies as well as a range of mid-budget crowd-pleasers and critically acclaimed films.

It also brings brands such as FX, National Geographic and "The Simpsons" into the same fold as ESPN and ABC — all part of Disney's gamble that only a company of this size can effectively thwart a furious charge into the business of entertainment by well-financed technology giants such as Netflix, Apple and Google.

Disney will pay \$52.4 billion for Fox, which for its part will spin off the Fox broadcast network, Fox News Channel and Fox Business Channel, the Fox studio lot in Los Angeles, and several FOX CONTINUED ON A18

For some, politics has made 'evangelical' a thorny label

BY JULIE ZAUFMER AND SARAH PULLIAM BAILEY

PASADENA, CALIF. — They all decided they wanted to become preachers and enrolled in seminary to learn how to spread the Gospel. They chose one of the most prominent evangelical seminaries in the country.

Yet here they were, these four young preachers-in-training from the Midwest, the South and the Northwest, hanging around after listening to sermons in class. They were debating whether they wanted to be the one thing Fuller Theological Seminary is known for: evangelicals.

"It's still a painful identity for me, coming from this election," said Paul Johnson, one of the students at Fuller.

Discomfort with the term "evangelical" began in some quarters with the Moral Majority in the Reagan years, which helped make "evangelical" synonymous with the Republican Party. Ever since, evangelicals have disagreed with each other about mixing faith and politics.

Such debates intensified last year when President Trump was elected with the overwhelming support of white evangelical voters after a vitriolic campaign that EVANGELICAL CONTINUED ON A2



DANIEL LEAL-OLIVAS/POOL/REUTERS

Six-month remembrance

Mourners outside St. Paul's Cathedral in London honor the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire, which killed 71 in June. The blaze was the deadliest in modern British history. Story, A6

Possible Rubio defection puts tax bill closer to the brink

BY JEFF STEIN, ERICA WERNER AND DAMIAN PALETTA

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) threatened Thursday to vote against Republicans' \$1.5 trillion tax overhaul unless it further expands a child tax credit to millions of working families, leaving GOP leaders searching for answers on a final deal that had appeared to be on the verge of sailing through the House and Senate.

Rubio, along with Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), wants Republican leaders to include the expansion as they reconcile separate tax measures passed by the House and

Senate, working to craft a final compromise bill that could pass both chambers and be sent President Trump for his signature.

GOP leaders had said Wednesday they believed that they had reached a broad agreement that both chambers could pass, and they planned to unveil the package Friday morning with hopes of voting on it early next

TAX CONTINUED ON A20

Nuances of tax cuts on display Families brought to White House show how savings will vary. A20

No sign of funding compromise In House, GOP moves ahead on bill Senate Democrats would reject. A4

IN THE NEWS

Charlottesville death A man who allegedly rammed his car into protesters in August was charged with first-degree murder. B1

Negotiating Brexit Talks are on the verge of a key phase even as British Prime Minister Theresa May is newly vulnerable. A8

THE NATION Rep. Blake Farenthold (R-Tex.), who was accused of sexual harassment, said he will not seek reelection next year. A4 The chief judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit initiated a review of misconduct allegations against Judge Alex Kozinski. A21

THE WORLD At least 6,700 Rohingya were killed in the Burmese crackdown's first month, an aid group said. A6

THE ECONOMY Sexual harassment is not the only form of discrimination women face at work, a Pew analysis found. A16

THE REGION A Metro audit found defects in the Red Line's signal system that could have led to a deadly crash. B1

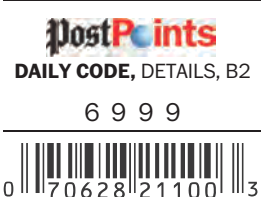
STYLE New York Times Publisher Arthur O. Sulzberger Jr. will be succeeded by his son. C3

SPORTS Old acquaintances Patrick Ewing and Jim Boeheim will meet again Saturday when Georgetown hosts Syracuse. D1

WEEKEND Nostalgia, evolved "The Last Jedi" deepens the characters while sticking with Star Wars' core values, Post critic Ann Hornaday writes. Also: Six places where you can get your Star Wars fix.

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